

ILLINOIS BRAILLE READING AND WRITING MANUAL

A Supplementary Manual for Rehabilitation Teachers
Working with the Adult Blind

Prepared by the

Staff of Community Services for the Visually Handicapped
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mary Lee Leahy, Director

Published by

College of Health and Human Services
Department of Blind Rehabilitation
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008

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PREFACE

A major restriction which blindness imposes is in the area of written communication. Braille makes it possible for the blind person to take in the written word, and, perhaps more importantly, makes it possible for him to make his own notations for his own use.

Because of the seemingly disproportionate averse reaction to the study of braille among blind persons, this manual has been prepared to offer understanding and suggestions regarding the approach to the teaching-learning process, as well as to guide the use of the Illinois Series as a teaching tool.

The manual has been prepared by the teaching staff of the Community Services for the Visually Handicapped, State of Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Mary Lee Leahy, Director, under the leadership of Alvin Roberts.

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Community Services for the Visually
Handicapped
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Family Services

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	READINESS	1
	Motivation	1
	Physical and mental factors	3
II	THE TEACHING OF BRAILLE READING	6
	Preparation of student	6
	Beginning lessons	7
	Problems of touch and finger motion	10
	Teaching new characters--concept and recognition	11
	Numbers and punctuation marks	13
	Lesson planning and work management	14
	Contractions	16
	Supplementary reading	17
III	TEACHING BRAILLE WRITING	18
	Readiness	18
	Writing preliminaries	18
	Dot conversion	20
	Embossing the dots	21
	Letter writing	21
	Application of braille writing	22
	Suggestions for projects	23
IV	FOLLOW-UP VISITS	24

CHAPTER I

READINESS

A student's readiness for braille instruction is primarily determined by his need for a tactual system of communication, his physical and mental capacities, and his overall attitude toward the use of braille. Therefore, a teacher should give careful consideration to data contained in medical and psychological reports, school reports, and case interviews. One or more pre-instructional interviews with the student supplements knowledge of him through direct observation and interaction, and creates a foundation for a teaching-learning relationship.

Motivation

1. Psychological barriers to learning braille:

The onset of blindness usually causes difficulties in the performance of even the small tasks of daily living, and understandably increases the fear of failure in these tasks. Since the total newness of braille may be even more anxiety-producing, it may be well, first, to help the student have success in remastering a previously used skill--such as a household task, or a craft.

If there is some doubt about the student's ability to learn braille, but he wishes to try, it should be clear that it is on a trial basis, thus, the student will be more able to accept an early termination of instruction than he would have, if the teacher had proceeded as though he believed the student would have little or no difficulty. Such an approach will also do much to enhance or maintain the student's confidence in the professional competency of his teacher.



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Because the newly-blinded person brings to the learning situation his preconceived positive and/or negative attitudes about blind people, before initiating braille, the student should be helped to:

- (1) Verbalize his attitudes toward braille as a symbol of blindness.
- (2) Examine the origin and validity of these attitudes as related to the learning and use of braille.
- (3) Understand that braille in itself does not isolate blind people, and that it can enhance a blind person's integration with his sighted friends because it enables him to function more adequately.
- (4) Understand that learning braille does not require the "sixth sense" usually attributed to blind people.

2. Suggestions for motivating the braille student:

The past experiences, interests and future goals of the student are relevant for written communication. The teacher can show the student how braille can assist him in realizing both present and long-range goals. Since most recently blinded persons have never considered the practical, everyday application of braille, it will usually be necessary for the teacher to discuss these with the student. These include:

- (1) Taking notes.
- (2) Keeping address and phone file.
- (3) Keeping business and household records.
- (4) Labeling containers.
- (5) Labeling envelopes containing important papers, phonograph records and playing cards.
- (6) Reading recipes and handcraft patterns.
- (7) Reading fiction and current periodicals.
- (8) Reading professional literature and textbooks.
- (9) Reading religious publications.
- (10) Preparing for the study of braille music notation.
- (11) Corresponding with agencies serving blind persons.

A very small suggestion such as the compiling of an address file can greatly increase the student's motivation for learning braille. Sometimes a student may appear to have no practical use for learning braille, but still wishes to do so. A few people will learn braille because of the challenge of learning something new and the accompanying feeling of accomplishment. Others may learn braille for the praise and attention they receive when displaying their new skill and explaining the braille system to friends, or at club meetings. The teacher should understand the student's primary motivation and gear the instruction accordingly. For example, the person who studies braille primarily for the purpose of explaining it to others may lose interest in continuing with lessons after learning the rudiments of the system. In some cases, the teacher may initiate or continue lessons in order to gain understanding of the student, as he reacts toward braille and/or instruction.

The teacher should be just as concerned and as skilled in motivating the student as he is technically proficient in the use of the braille system.

Physical and mental factors

In general, braille instruction should be given only to those persons whose vision is so limited that they cannot read well enough to meet their needs, even with the use of an optical aid. However, there may be times when the teacher initiates braille instruction with a student with reading vision whose visual prognosis is poor. For example, some persons who believe that they will eventually lose most of their sight will request braille instruction in order to be equipped with a method of reading when they can no longer see. In such cases, the primary factor to be considered is the degree of anxiety which the study of braille may create in the student. If he is extremely fearful of his forthcoming blindness, and if the study of braille

causes him to intensify his worry, it might be well to postpone braille instruction until the student can emotionally accept his handicap. If the decision is made to provide instruction to persons who still have reading vision, care should be taken to insure that the student learns to read braille tactually.

If he depends on his sight to read braille, further visual failure will make it necessary to repeat that part of the instruction which emphasizes the tactile method of reading. Such students do not use the techniques of tactual reading taught by the home teacher and, therefore, do not need the home teacher's concentrated attention. In such cases, the teacher would serve more as a consultant, giving advice on the technical aspects of braille as requested by the student.

It is important for the braille student to have adequate tactile skills. If there are problems of tactile perception as related to his potential for learning braille, the teacher should try to ascertain whether the problem is one which lends itself to remedial teaching efforts or is of a more permanent nature, possibly resulting from some type of physical impairment. For instance, in observing the student's early attempts at braille reading, it may be found that he has been accustomed to doing work which has calloused his fingers, making tactual recognition of characters difficult, or he may be so visually oriented to reading print that he experiences confusion in trying to visualize letters made up of dots, and perceived through the fingers. In either case, the student is faced with a perceptual problem, but one which may be amenable to remedial teaching. If difficulties in perceiving the braille characters persist and if the student has some physical condition such as diabetes, hardening of the arteries, etc., which might cause a reduction in the tactile sense, a consultation with the client's

physician might be indicated before proceeding with the instructional program. In some cases, medical consultation may reveal that the physician has prescribed medication which temporarily reduces tactile perception, or, that some other physical problem is causing the tactual difficulty.

The student's mental capacity and educational achievement will have a significant influence in such aspects of braille instruction as the length of assignments, frequency of teaching visits, and rate of progress in learning braille. If spelling is a serious problem, then both the teacher and the student should be prepared for the difficulties which will arise. However, the combination of a strongly motivated, reasonably intelligent student, and a resourceful teacher can work out this problem.

CHAPTER II

THE TEACHING OF BRAILLE READING

Preparation of student

The instructor might initiate the study of braille with a little of its history. The student should then be shown the braille cell, either in the textbook or by pegboard. The shape and the dot numbering concepts should be explained and various examples given, until the formation is grasped. These are valuable concepts. They simplify the explanation of letter formations, make it easier for the teacher to determine whether the student understands the pattern of a letter, and make the lower position of punctuation marks and certain contractions far easier to teach. If the student is unable to assimilate dot numbering, the teacher should not belabor the point. This understanding may come at a later time when some of the letters have been learned.

See that the student is comfortably seated before each lesson. The relationship of the height of chair and table should permit the upper arm and the forearm to form approximately a 90-degree angle when reading. An alternative is to have the student sit in an armchair with the book placed upon a board laid across the chair arms. He should be discouraged from reading with the book on his lap. He should sit erect with his feet flat on the floor. The teacher should sit where he can check the student's reading techniques frequently, in order to ascertain that the student is maintaining proper posture, position, and technique. It is recommended that the teacher use an extra copy of the textbook, thereby reducing interference with the student's hands.

Beginning lessons

Although occasional reference will be made to the Braille Series, 1960, available from the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky, the method of teaching braille outlined in the following pages could be applied, with variations, to any book the teacher wishes to use.

It is assumed that the braille cell has already been explained and that the student is seated comfortably with his book on the table before him. Advise the student to keep his touch light. This may have to be repeated many times. Place the student's slightly extended index finger upon a letter and instruct him to curve the other fingers slightly. Before teaching any of the letters, it is wise to teach hand positions and the general motions employed in moving from one line to another, which are so necessary to the proper application of the two-handed reading method. Place the student's left hand at the beginning of the line with the forefinger resting on the first letter. Move the left hand over the first third of the line and put the right forefinger on the same line so that it touches the left index finger. The right hand moves to the right end of the line, with the ball of the finger resting lightly on the letters and the other three fingers slightly curved and resting lightly on the page. The essential factors governing hand position are that of relaxation and comfort. When the right hand leaves the left hand, the left hand retraces the line to the left margin, then drops to the beginning of the line below. As soon as the right hand has come to the end of the line, the left hand begins moving toward the center of the next line, where it is joined by the right hand. If this hand pattern is repeated until it is grasped, it becomes somewhat automatic, and the likelihood of the pupil's becoming a two-handed reader will be greatly increased. Many problems, particularly those dealing with the location of a new line,

will be prevented.

Now we are ready to teach the first assignment (Braille Series, 1960, letters a through e). Place the student's left forefinger in the reading position on the letter "a" at the top of the page. Tell him that "a" is dot 1. Teach the letter "b" also with the left hand. Teach the next three letters in the same way, but use the right hand. At this point, the student is ready to begin reading the first page. Be sure he uses the same alternate hand motions as described above. It may be necessary to review the formation of the letters several times during the reading of the page. When the student is reasonably familiar with the general pattern of the page, have him check any unrecognized letter by holding his place with one hand and reaching to the top of the page to locate the correct letter with the other hand. When the correct letter is discovered, have him identify it by checking with the print equivalent shown above. In this way, he is learning constructive, independent study habits from the beginning. He should be made aware of the guidelines shown on the first few pages, and their functions should be explained. The difference in spacing between individual letters and the letters in the words should be stressed. After the letters in a word have been read, have the student pronounce the word. This practice gives him an easy method by which to check the accuracy of his reading when the teacher is not present.

If most of the first two pages contained in this assignment have been read, the next two letters may be given as a part of the first lesson. If the student seems confused, no further materials should be assigned. With the introduction of these letters, the first sentences are given. The student should be taught from the beginning to read with comprehension.

As lessons progress, check student's reading position and reading

technique frequently. Remind him to keep his touch light; stress the importance of dividing the reading between the left and right hand. Most students show a definite preference for one hand over the other. It is a rare pupil who reads braille exactly as described in the preceding paragraphs--the left hand reading approximately one-third and the right hand reading two-thirds of the line. However, even though the greater burden will fall on the preferred hand, it is to be hoped that some independent use of both hands is retained. Since surveys indicate that two-handed readers are, as a group, superior to those who read with only one hand, this method is to be encouraged.

If the student has difficulty recognizing certain familiar letters, check the angle of the book. Sometimes it is necessary to place the book in such a way that the hand can move across the line at the angle which the student used while writing script. This makes use of muscle memory to guide the hand from left to right in a straight line. In any event, the finger should point directly to the top of the page. At first the student will read each letter aloud. Reading whole words will vary with the reader. Some may do this in the first or second lesson, while others may begin much later. It might be suggested that the student cease spelling the words after completing the material through the letter "j" in the Braille Series, 1960, Book I. The teacher can then suggest that the student say the word aloud after having read the letters silently. An exception should be made for unusually difficult words. As soon as possible, encourage the student to read in phrases of ever-increasing length; this point is not likely to be reached with most people until the end of the alphabet or later.

Problems of touch and finger motion

From the outset, the braille teacher must be concerned not only with the horizontal movement of the student's hands, but also with the various finger movements and pressures applied by the student in his attempt to achieve tactual recognition of individual characters. A few facts about the sense of touch may help both teacher and student in selecting and using the most effective techniques for achieving rapid discrimination of various dot patterns. It requires much more energy to perceive tactually than visually. This helps to explain why braille readers apparently become fatigued more quickly than print readers. The tactual system, quite simply consists of receptors in the skin, innervated by peripheral nerves from the dorsal roots of the spinal cord, synapsing in the mid-brain and in the thalamus, with subsequent fanning out to various regions of the cortex. When reading braille the sensation of touch is the perception of vibrations of the nerve endings in the skin on the fingers resulting from friction or pressure. The sensation of touch depends on motion. When motion stops, touch fades. Effective reading of braille requires enough finger motion to stimulate touch, but not so much that the finger loses contact with a part of the character being observed. The beginning student, who does not read fast enough to insure sufficient motion by moving from character to character, must have some other way of creating finger motion. This motion is usually achieved by new students through a vertical, horizontal, or rotating motion of the reading fingers. Of course, a certain amount of such motion is necessary at the beginning, but the height and width of the finger movement should be kept at a minimum necessary to stimulate tactual sensations. If the motion is exaggerated, either vertically or horizontally, the confusion of one character with a portion of another usually results.

Beginning students often use exaggerated finger motions with excess finger pressure. The more difficulty they experience in perceiving a particular letter, the more pressure they apply, resulting in a marked decrease in tactile perception. Excess finger pressure also depresses the dots which, in turn, makes the letter more difficult to perceive. The student should be encouraged to apply no muscular pressure on the dots since the weight of the finger creates adequate pressure to insure tactual perception.

Another problem encountered frequently during the first few lessons is the confusion of letter sequence in words. This is often caused by exaggerated horizontal finger motions resulting from the student's attempt to perceive a character. Many times a student will leave a difficult letter which is giving him trouble and approach it again after re-reading the previous letters in the word. This loss of letter sequence in a word is often very discouraging to the student, who may begin to fear that he has forgotten how to spell. The teacher should explain the source of a student's confusion. In some instances, it may be best to have the student pass over the difficult letter and read the remaining letters in the word. Thus, recognition of the whole word can help identify the difficult letter by context. When this procedure is followed, the teacher should have the student reread the difficult letter carefully to acquire a tactual perception of this letter in relation to adjacent letters in the word.

Teaching new characters--concept and recognition

To introduce the form of a new braille character, one can build on previously acquired images, by associations of likeness or difference. Mastery of dot numbering makes the teaching of letters, punctuation marks,

and contractions far simpler. Also, shapes of letters may be stressed, their relationship to preceding and following signs, or any other meaningful association that can be found.

For letter recognition, there is merit in pointing out the number and location of dots, and the likeness to, or difference from, previously learned letters. For example, "d" is like the letter "e" with the dot 4 added. "F" is like "c" with dot 2 added. Drill in the identification of the corner letters "d, f, h, and j" is usually necessary. They can be presented by both dot numbers and also as the four corners of a square. The corners of a page can be used to represent the letters, or the shapes of the letters might be "drawn". It is advisable to teach the student that letters "k" through "t" are formed by adding dot 3 to the first ten letters and that the remaining letters are made by adding dot 6. Discuss the one exception, letter "w". Letters can also be associated with certain arbitrary shapes. For example, "L" is like the print number 1; "o" is like the print "c" in reverse; "p" is like the print "f" with the lower horizontal line missing; "s" is like the man with his head bowed forward. With the introduction of letters using dots 3 and 6, the necessity for reading with the ball of the finger can be stressed. If the student should read "j" for "t", or "e" for "o", it signifies that his finger is covering only two-thirds of the cell.

When the student has learned new letters he should strive for rapid recognition. Focus should change from conscious, mental association, to recall of the character from the perception of its tactual image. This can be compared to the need to "think" in a language when one is learning an unfamiliar tongue.

Adventitiously blinded persons often find it difficult to relate to braille characters without first visualizing the corresponding printed

characters. This results in confusion of the two systems of reading. For example, a student may continue to confuse the braille letter "h" with the printed letter "L" and the braille letter "L" with the printed letter "i". To encourage "visualization in braille", the student might try to form mental images of braille dots of white on a dark background--relating braille dots to dominoes, or braille characters on a chalk board.

Some students experience strain and headaches during braille study. They can often be observed bending over the braille books as though they were trying to see the dots. This may be confusion of visual perception with tactual perception. Tactual skills can only be accomplished by increased concentration on proper tactile reading techniques. Bending over the page can distort the position for reading braille. The arms and hands may be tense, thereby decreasing tactual perception. The student is likely to try to compensate for this by increasing the amount of finger pressure and movement. These are self-defeating techniques, which both teacher and student should strive to avoid.

Numbers and punctuation marks

Recognition of braille numbers requires an understanding of the number sign and its use. Have student read numbers 1 through 10. Have him give letter equivalents of numbers. Have the student read through number exercises in the text. Have him read page numbers chosen at random. Practice reading numbers in succeeding lessons. A deck of braille cards can help. The two most common points at which numbers are introduced come after completing letter "j" or at the end of the alphabet.

The teacher of braille is not a grammarian, but if the pupil understands the essentials of punctuation, the teacher's task will be far easier. The student should understand that the capital sign is dot 6, that it directly precedes the letter it affects, and that it is used at

the beginning of all sentences, proper names, days of the week, etc. The period is taught as a lower "d", as dots 2, 5, and 6, and is used at the conclusion of most sentences and abbreviations. Uses of the comma may be explained. Indicate that it is dot 2 and that it always follows the adjacent letter, and is on a level with the middle of the cell. Lower sign punctuation marks or contractions can be more easily recognized if the position is related to the preceding or following letters. The extent of instruction of punctuation marks will depend on the goals of the student. For further information, the student may refer to a supplementary reading pamphlet, "Punctuation Marks", which is available from the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky. Composition signs, such as the italic sign and the double capital sign, must receive careful explanation.

Lesson planning and work management

Lessons should include both familiar and unfamiliar material. Review letters and signs with which the student has had difficulty. For example, if the lower "d" were a problem, ask the student to tell what the lower "d" represents, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the word. Be specific in assignments. Point out unusual material--such as the omission of guidelanes beginning with page 12 in Book I, Braille Series, 1960.

Length of assignments will vary with students. It is important to instruct the student in correction of improper reading techniques, even though it means less material covered. For example, the student who insists on reading the dot patterns with his finger tips may be assigned the rereading of a very familiar selection. The purpose is to read the selection with his fingers in proper position until he is able to recognize tactually those characters which he knows from memory are in the

selection. Many pupils need help in the establishment of good study habits. In general, results are better if short, frequent study periods can be arranged.

If a student tends not to prepare his assignments, the teacher should look to the cause. Some persons find braille so difficult, they cannot learn it. If the teacher is convinced that this is the cause, it may be well to work toward an early termination of lessons.

The student may not want to discontinue braille because it would represent a personal failure or because he wishes the teacher to continue to visit him. If the teacher's visits really serve a supplementary purpose, a certain amount of non-productive braille instruction might be permitted, depending on the student's need and the teacher's caseload. If the student feels a sense of failure, the teacher can help him realize that many blind people--successful blind people--do not learn braille, that there are certain deterrants, such as poor sense of touch, over which the student has no control.

If the student has capacity to learn braille, but does not, it may be due to one of many factors. He may be harrassed by economic and domestic worries which interfere with concentration. If pressures are too great, lessons may be profitably discontinued for a time. Braille may be symbolic of permanent blindness, which the student is not ready to accept. The preceding comments indicate that the teacher should look beneath the surface and seek the cause rather than condemn the student as lazy or uninterested. At times, one may have a student who, for some reason, is uninterested; the teacher may need to review the fact that he is visiting him to teach braille, but since the student does not appear sufficiently interested to prepare his assignments, perhaps lessons should be stopped. A trial period of perhaps three lessons might be offered

after which, if there is no indication of increased effort on the pupil's part, the lessons would be terminated. This is, of course, not done in a spirit of anger, and the student should know that he can request the resumption of lessons when he feels ready.

Contractions

As the chief aim of braille is to be of practical use to the student, some students will not wish to continue beyond uncontracted braille. If the student has difficulty, the teacher should evaluate his needs and his difficulty, and discuss with the student the gains he will have acquired by learning uncontracted braille. With this knowledge, he can do certain limited reading. If he can learn to write the alphabet, he can keep accounts and an address file. For some persons, this may be enough. Often when uncontracted braille has been sufficiently absorbed, the student may wish further lessons. Those who will use braille extensively and who will need speed may study a highly contracted form, such as Grade III.

There is little difference between the teaching of contractions and letters. Explain the formation of the sign and, as indicated, make pertinent associations. For example, in the letters of the alphabet which contain the "k" formation (letters such as "m", "n", "o", "y", and "z") this "k" (dots 1 and 3) is always on the left. A number of contractions also contain the "k" (such as the signs for "the", "and", "ed", "ow", and "ing") but this "k" (dots 4 and 6) is always on the right. Certain signs can be related to the letters of which they are the reverse by means of a word which contains both the letter and the sign--for example, "mash", "need", "path", etc. A resourceful teacher can create many other associations.

Explain the rules governing the use of the signs. If it is understood that the sign representing the letters "ble" can never be used at the beginning of a word because it would stand for a number sign, or that the signs for "ence", "ing", etc., can never be used at the beginning of a word, the student's confusion with the multiplicity of similar signs can be greatly reduced.

Supplementary reading

At any point in the study of braille, the teacher may depart from the text and introduce supplementary reading. For a full description of books available and the style and degree to which they are contracted, check with the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky.

Additional reading material is often introduced either at the end of Book I, Braille Series, 1960; shortly before the end of Book II at the point where standard spacing is introduced; or at the conclusion of Books II and III. This helps the student acquire a greater speed, plus a "reading sense", the ability to read in phrases and to anticipate words. It may also help the student to overcome undesirable reading habits which he may have acquired. Perhaps the student's desire to learn braille might be increased if he reads something of interest to him, such as a book on the history of braille, the biography of Bob Feller, or fiction. Care should be taken in assigning supplementary reading to make certain it is consistent with the student's literary taste.

CHAPTER III

TEACHING BRAILLE WRITING

Readiness

Braille writing can build on reading skills. Generally, the student should begin writing only after he has attained a reading knowledge of uncontracted braille. Occasionally, however, a student is ready to learn braille writing sooner. In such instances the teacher will have determined the student's ability and readiness.

Knowledge of the dot numbering system will facilitate writing. Knowledge of spelling and English grammar make for clarity of written communication. Adequate motor coordination is necessary to manipulate writing tools appropriately.

For more specific information regarding the student's readiness, refer to Section I.

Students are motivated to learn braille writing for varied readiness. Some may want to mark playing cards, while others may need to take classroom notes, etc.

The seating arrangement, height of table and chair, and student's body position are the same as described in the foregoing discussion of physical arrangements for teaching braille reading, Chapter I, of this manual.

Writing preliminaries

It is assumed that the standard, four-line slate is used. The student should become familiar with the slate and stylus before he begins embossing dots. The teacher should explain the function of the equipment and

its operation. As the student is examining the slate, explain the relationship between the windows on the face side and indentations on the under side. Inform the student of the number of windows per line and the number of lines, which are numbered from top to bottom. Point out the ridge which runs horizontally across the slate and which separates lines two and three. Mention that the ridge serves as a guide to help keep one's place while writing. By running his finger across the slate, the student can discover a series of embossed dots which are between lines one and two, as well as between three and four. These dots are so placed that they divide the line into groups of five windows each. These serve as a guide for locating one's place and for writing columns.

The student is now ready to open the slate. As he does so, the teacher can explain that the slate opens like a book, pointing out that the hinge is to the left when the slate is in writing position.

As the student tactually investigates the inside of the slate, he will observe four pegs, one at each corner. These serve to hold paper in position while writing.

The student is now ready to examine the stylus and is told that this instrument is used to punch the dots. With the slate in the open position have the student insert the stylus into one of the windows, explaining that each window contains six indentations, three on the right and three on the left, which are divided by two tiny protrusions on each side of the window. When the slate is closed, these indentations correspond with the six indentations on the inner side of the slate.

With the slate open before him, the student places the upper edge of the paper against the two upper pegs. The left edge of the paper should be placed directly against the hinge. The paper is then held firmly in place with both index fingers which are put just below the two top pegs.

With his thumbs, have the student depress the paper until it has been pierced by the lower pegs. Now have him close the slate in preparation for writing. When all the lines have been used, place the thumbs on the lower pegs of the open slate. Lift the paper off the pegs, keeping the thumbs on the perforations in the paper. Move the paper upward until these perforations slide on top of the upper pegs, making sure that the left edge of the paper is aligned with the hinge of the slate. Then close the slate, thus causing the bottom pegs to perforate the paper. Inform the student that this same practice is repeated as each four lines are completed.

Dot conversion

Explain that all braille written on a slate is embossed on the underside of the paper. Therefore, it is necessary to emboss the left hand dots (one, two, and three) on the right side of the cell, and the right hand dots (four, five, and six) on the left side of the cell. An example can be given such as driving three nails through a board and noting how they come through on the underside. Not only are the dots embossed in reverse order, but on the slate writing is done from right to left. Therefore, dot one is located in the upper right hand corner of the cell and dot six in the lower left hand corner.

When the student understands this dot system, he will begin writing letters accordingly. Thus, the letter "n" will be written by using dots one, three, four and five rather than dots one, four, five and three. It is important for the student to have a working knowledge of the reverse principle which is involved in braille writing in order to become competent and use it effectively.

Embossing the dots

With the paper inserted and the slate in the correct position for writing, place the stylus in the student's hand, between the thumb and second finger, with the index finger curved over the stub. Emphasize the necessity for holding the stylus perpendicular to the paper, as a punch. By so doing, embossed dots will be clear and easy to read.

When writing, the student should have his right forearm lying flat on the table. The movement of the stylus within the cell, and from one cell to another, should be accomplished by a wrist-finger movement. Move the forearm slightly to the left as this becomes necessary. Have the student emboss the entire six dots of the cell in order to familiarize himself with the reverse system.

To allow for a margin at the top of the page, begin writing on the second line of the slate. Have the student locate the first cell on the slate with his left index finger, which is placed at the lower left hand corner of the cell. Before the stylus is moved to the next cell, the left forefinger moves to the lower left hand corner of it. This process is used in locating each succeeding cell, keeping the index finger slightly ahead of the stylus. A practice of this process before actual writing is helpful. Next, the student can be introduced to writing simple letters.

It is extremely important that the teacher demonstrate each new operation and guide the student carefully in his initial performance. This makes it possible for the teacher to ascertain how completely the student is assimilating the instruction, and also provides an opportunity to correct any wrong learning before it has become a habit.

Letter writing

The student is now ready to write letters. Of the possible groupings by which letters may be introduced, the most obvious is the teaching

of letters in alphabetical order. However, there is merit in a plan which first introduces the letters which are easiest to write: "a", "b", "l", "k", "c", "g". When these are mastered, simple words such as "black", "lag", "call", etc., can be written by the student. A workable sequence for the introduction of the remaining letters is the following: "d", "e", "f", "i", "h", "j", "m", "n", "o", "u", "p", "q", "r", "s", "t", "v", "w", "x", "y", "z". This is the grouping used in the Illinois Braille Writing Drills prepared by the Illinois Braille Committee. The teacher may assist the student in composing words and sentences as new letters are learned.

At this point, the basic punctuation marks can be taught. Usually the student will be able to figure them out himself. It is suggested that the first punctuation mark to be taught should be the capital sign. Since the majority of statements end with a period, teach it next. Follow with those which the student is likely to use in his own writing.

A thorough understanding of the process of braille writing, and knowledge of contractions, are basic to writing braille contractions. A common practice is to teach the reading and writing of contractions simultaneously. That is, the student begins writing contractions as soon as he has studied them in the reading text. One might assign words and sentences in uncontracted braille which he is to convert into contractions. The Illinois Braille Writing Workbook incorporates this system into lessons which are correlated with the lessons in Books II and III of the Braille Series, 1960 Edition. When the student has reached this level of understanding, he will usually be able to work out the writing of signs with little difficulty.

Application of braille writing

Learning is more effective and lasting when the student finds a

purpose for it. It is suggested, therefore, that the teacher and student agree on a project that the student will find useful. This will also give the teacher an opportunity to evaluate the student's understanding of, and ability to write, braille. After such a project has been completed, the student will have gained a sense of accomplishment and further motivation to continue writing braille.

Suggestions for projects

1. Labeling containers
2. Labeling envelopes containing important and useful papers
3. Making name, address and telephone file
4. Brailling playing cards
5. Copying recipes
6. Marking record albums
7. Writing short stories
8. Writing a resume of a story which has been read
9. Writing letters

The skillful and resourceful teacher will find many other projects which can be adapted to the needs and interests of the student.

CHAPTER IV

FOLLOW-UP VISITS

After the conclusion of lessons, it may be advisable to arrange periodic contacts to determine whether the student is using the skill he has acquired. Whether the stopping point has been uncontracted or contracted braille, certain purposes for the use of braille should have been agreed upon by teacher and student. The contacts should be continued until these goals have been attained or, at least, striven for. If student is seriously interested in reading books or magazines, the teacher should help secure them. The teacher might talk with the librarian, explaining that since this new borrower has only recently learned to read braille, the books sent to him should be in good condition. Regular help may be needed for a time until the student is able to enjoy the various kinds of reading material. The table of contents may need to be explored or new signs, such as those for the footnote or certain specialized abbreviations, explained. The teacher should exert all her influence to help the student use his new skill. This is particularly true in the writing of braille. Emphasize the use of braille by providing patterns, recipes, or any other specialty in which the student is interested.

The progress of the United States has been due, at least in part, to a feeling that the skills of reading and writing are the privilege and obligation of each citizen. This should be true of blind people, as well as of those with sight. It is the teacher's duty to convey this idea to all of those students who can physically and emotionally accept it.

To help the student realize that braille can perform the same functions as print, is perhaps the teacher's chief responsibility in motivating the student to learn braille, and upon her success or failure depends the worthwhileness of her efforts.

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116

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